

This southern route had been known by several names since parts of it had first been used by Juan Bautista de Anza. In the early 1800s it was known as the Sonora Road, used regularly by Mexicans traveling between Sonora and California. In the mid-1800s, the United State military expeditions of General Stephen Kearney and Colonel Phillip St. James Cooke traversed the desert along the route to occupy California during the Mexican-American War. In 1849, it became known as the Southern Emigrant Trail, used by thousands of Americans traveling to the gold fields in Northern California.

But in 1857, the United State Congress authorized the San Antonio & San Diego Mail to establish an overland mail route between the Mississippi River and San Francisco. The first SA&SD mail riders, traveling west from San Antonio, arrived in San Diego on August 31, 1857 establishing the first transcontinental mail line.



Overland Mail Route, Anza-Borrego Desert State Park

The *San Diego Herald* proclaimed it **“the most important event which has ever occurred in the annals of San Diego, and undoubtedly constitutes an epoch in the Pacific Coast of the Union, which will be recorded and remembered with just pride, long after the mails will have been transported on the great continental railroad, the first rail of which may be thus said to have been laid”** (San Diego Herald 9-5-1857)



Vallecito Stage Station, Vallecito County Park

Activities in 2007, celebrating this important event, include several car tour and hiking explorations of the stage station sites and mail routes in Mexico, the Colorado Desert, and Riverside and San Diego Counties. Equestrian focused reenactments along the route are scheduled in Anza-Borrego Desert and Cuyamaca Rancho State Parks and at Vallecito and Peñasquitos County Parks. And a celebration of the arrival of the mail will take place on August 31, 2007 in Old Town State Historic Park.

Events Calendar

January 27: **Auto Tour** to Mexico Stage Station sites with Arizona Historical Society 928.782.1841

February 10, 11, 24, March 17, June 9: **Lectures and Auto Tour** of San Diego and Riverside County Stage Station sites with California State Parks 760.767.4063

February 23 - 25, May and June: View **horse and mule riders bring the mail cross country** 760.767.4063

August 31: **The mail arrives** in Old Town San Diego and is greeted with celebration

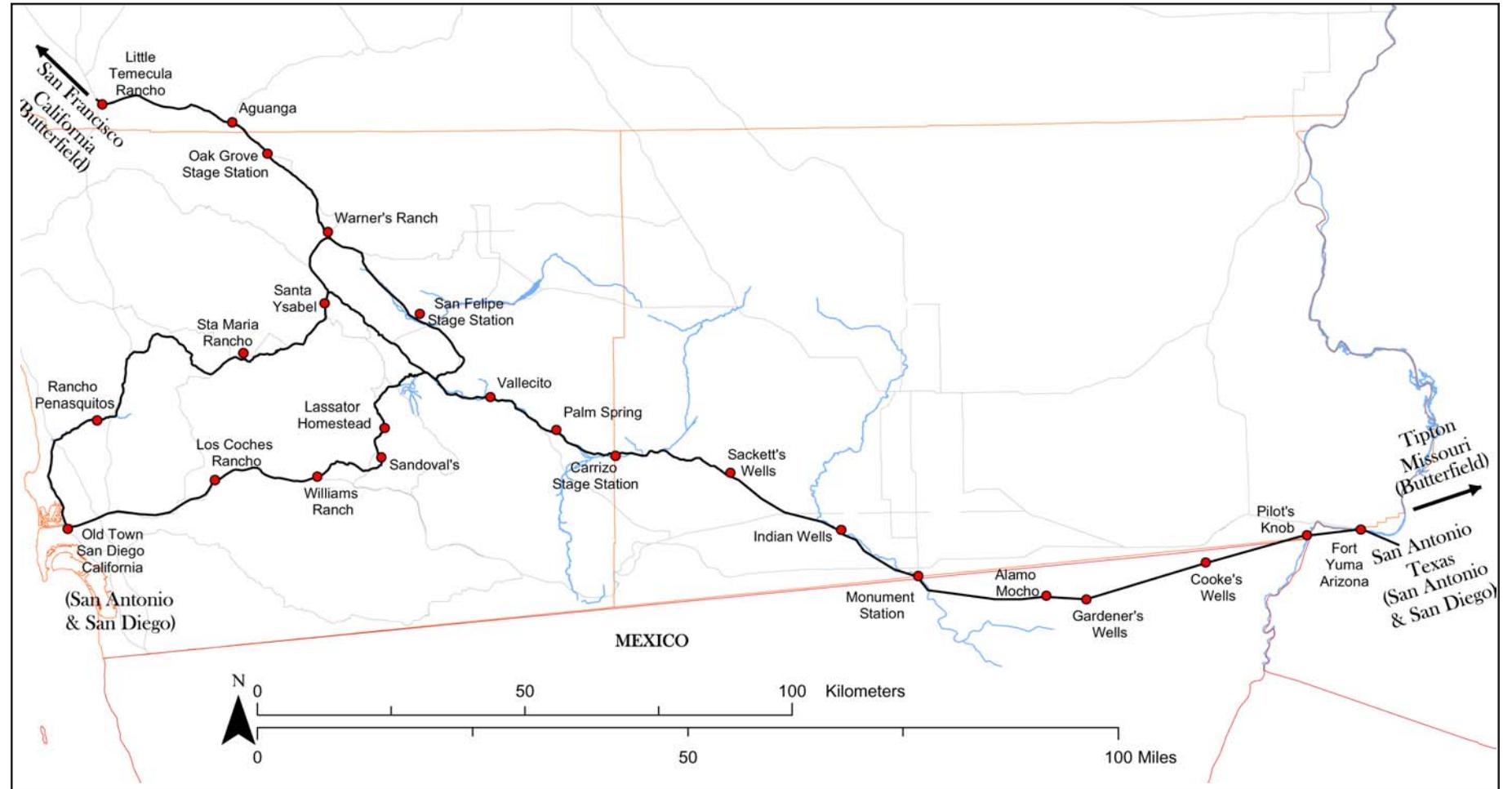
For a complete listing of commemorative events, please see www.parks.ca.gov/archaeology



Events Celebrate the First Transcontinental Mail Route Linking the United States with the California Frontier

In 2007, several agencies in the southland are planning events to commemorate and memorialize the 1857 completion of the San Antonio and San Diego Mail Line. The SA&SD was the first intercontinental communication link, joining the newly-won western territories with the Midwest and East Coast of the United States. The SA&SD blazed the trail for the Butterfield Stage route that replaced it in 1858.

The San Antonio & San Diego Mail / Butterfield Stage route crosses some 35 miles of the Anza-Borrego Desert State Parklands. Today, driving on paved roads, the park visitor can easily experience vast areas of the Anza-Borrego Desert that in earlier decades were only accessible by foot or on horseback. Commuters regularly travel between Yuma, Arizona and San Diego, California, a trip of less than 8 hours and of no particular hardship.



Overland Mail Mud Wagon

In the nineteenth century, however, such a journey took many days and without proper planning, could be quite dangerous. The delays and hazards not only made travel difficult, but precluded reliable communication. Today, computers and cell phones provide us with instant communication. In the

nineteenth century, letters took days to compose and months to cross the Southwest deserts and Midwest plains between the West and East coasts of the United States. In 1850 San Diego, it might have been months before the citizens learned of important news events such as the election of the President or a scientific discovery.

Shortly after California was annexed to the United States at the end of the Mexican-American War in 1848, reliable transportation and communication between the West and East coasts became an immediate need. The United States sent expeditions to explore the southern route for transportation and communication possibilities.